

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

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R 210150Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3257

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PEPR, PBOR, CH, RP

SUBJECT: PRC VICE PREMIER'S VISIT TO PHILIPPINES

REF: (A) MANILA 3965, (B) MANILA 4232, (C) MANILA 4382

1. SUMMARY: PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) VICE PREMIER LI ENDED A FOUR DAY VISIT TO THE PHILIPPINES MARCH 16. AS THE FIRST SENIOR PRC OFFICIAL TO VISIT SINCE THE TWO NATIONS ESTABLISHED

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN 1975, LI WAS TREATED

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TO AN EFFUSIVE WELCOME AND FOUR DAYS OF PHILIPPINE HOSPITALITY. THE PRINCIPAL RESULTS OF THE VISIT WERE AN AGREEMENT ON SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AND REAFFIRMATION BY LI OF CHINA'S COMMITMENT TO SETTLE DIPLOMATICALLY ANY PROBLEMS ARISING OVER CONFLICTING CLAIMS TO THE SPRATLY ISLANDS. LI ALSO REPORTEDLY EXPRESSED CHINA'S SUPPORT FOR THE ASEAN CONCEPT OF A ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY

IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. SYMBOLICALLY, THE LI VISIT SERVED, AS RECENT VISITS BY OTHER COMMUNIST LEADERS HAVE, TO UNDERLINE PHILIPPINE MEMBERSHIP IN THE THIRD WORLD. IN BASIC TERMS, THE PRC IS IMPORTANT TO THE PHILIPPINES AS A POWERFUL NEIGHBOR, A SOURCE OF OIL AND A POTENTIAL MARKET FOR SOME PHILIPPINE PRODUCTS. THE SPRATLYS, HOWEVER, REPRESENT ONE OF THE MORE IMMEDIATE REASONS FOR IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH THE PRC. END SUMMARY.

2. PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA VICE PREMIER LI HSIEN NIEN ENDED HIS VISIT TO THE PHILIPPINES MARCH 16 FOLLOWING FOUR DAYS OF EFFUSIVE PHILIPPINE HOSPITALITY. LI, WHO ARRIVED IN MANILA WITH A THIRTY-MEMBER PARTY, IS THE FIRST HIGH RANKING CHINESE OFFICIAL TO VISIT THE PHILIPPINES SINCE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WERE ESTABLISHED IN 1975; LI'S VISIT ALSO MARKS THE FIRST TIME A SENIOR PRC OFFICIAL HAS VISITED AN ASEAN NATION. TO HONOR LI, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES (GOP) PREPARED A ROYAL WELCOME WHICH INCLUDED BUSLOADS OF FLAG-WAVING MANILA SCHOOL CHILDREN AND NATIVE DANCING ALONG THE MOTORCADE ROUTE. THE WELCOME, WHICH CLEARLY OUTSHONE THOSE PROVIDED OTHER RECENT VISITORS, ELICITED COMPARISONS BY LOCAL OBSERVERS WITH OTHER HIGHPOINTS OF LOCAL HOSPITALITY, INCLUDING THE WELCOMES ACCORDED THE MISS UNIVERSE CONTESTANTS IN 1974 AND PRESIDENT FORD IN 1975.

3. DRESSED IN THE TRADITIONAL PHILIPPINE BARONG SHIRT, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PURCHASED OFF THE RACK BY THE PRC EMBASSY (THOUGH DIGNITARIES ARE TRADITIONALLY GIVEN A CUSTOM-MADE BARONG BY THE GOP), LI WAS TAKEN FIRST TO THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL ARTS CENTER BY IMELDA MARCOS WHERE HE WITNESSED A PERFORMANCE OF THE PHILIPPINE YOUTH SYMPHONY, FOLK DANCING AND A COCK FIGHT AND WAS FETED AT A BUFFET FOR 800 GUESTS. MARCH 14. THE FOLLOWING DAY HE WAS ESCORTED BY PRESIDENT MARCOS TO THE PHILIPPINE EXPORT PROCESSING ZONE IN BATAAN, WHERE HE TOURED FACTORIES AND MET PHILIPPINE WORKERS. ON THE RETURN TRIP ON THE PRESIDENTIAL YACHT, HE AND FOREIGN MINISTER HUANG HUA TALKED PRIVATELY WITH PRESIDENT MARCOS AND FOREIGN SECRETARY ROMULO FOR TWO HOURS.

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4. SUBSTANTIVE HIGH POINTS OF VISIT WERE MARCOS' ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE PRC AND PHILIPPINES HAD AGREED IN 1975 TO SETTLE PEACEFULLY ANY DISPUTE OVER THE SPRATLY ISLANDS (CLAIMED BY THE PRC, VIETNAM, REPUBLIC OF CHINA, AND THE PHILIPPINES) (SEE MANILA 3965 AND MANILA 4382) AND SIGNING OF A SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AGREEMENT MARCH 15. FOLLOWING PRE-FACE PLEDGING COOPERATION ON BASIS OF "EQUILITY, RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER'S INDEPENDENCE AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY, NON-INTERFERENCE IN EACH OTHER'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND MUTUAL BENEFIT" THE AGREEMENT STIPULATED THE TWO COUNTRIES WILL EXCHANGE PROFESSIONALS AND TECHNICIANS, TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DATA AND SEEDS, SPECIMENS AND OTHER MATERIALS FOR EXPERIMENTATION. FURTHER AGREEMENTS WILL BE NEGOTIATED FOR SPECIFIC PROJECTS.

5. PRESIDENT MARCOS, AS A NEWS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING LI'S DEPARTURE, REPORTED LI'S ASSURANCE THAT THE PRC WILL NOT INTERFERE IN THE AFFAIRS OF SMALLER NATIONS AND HIS "PLEDGE" OF SUPPORT FOR THE ASEAN CONCEPT OF A ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. ACCORDING TO MARCOS,

LI ALSO DISCLAIMED ANY INTENTION ON THE PART OF THE PRC TO SUPPORT THE NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY'S COMMUNIST INSURGENCY. MARCOS STATED THE QUESTION OF US MILITARY BASES WAS NOT TAKEN UP WITH LI (MANILA 4232).

6. COMMENT: PART THEATER AND PART SUBSTANCE, LI'S VISIT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN, FROM THE PHILIPPINE POINT OF VIEW, A SUBSTANTIAL SUCCESS. LIKE THE RECENT VISITS OF EAST GERMAN PARTY CHIEF HONNICKER AND VIETNAMESE FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN DUY TRINH, THE LI VISIT SERVED TO TESTIFY FURTHER TO PHILIPPINE MEMBERSHIP IN THE THIRD WORLD. ON A MORE CONCRETE LEVEL, AS MARCOS POINTED OUT FOLLOWING LI'S DEPARTURE, THE PHILIPPINES HAS STRONG REASONS FOR CULTIVATING THE CHINESE, CHINA IS IMMENSE AND RELATIVELY CLOSE NEIGHBOR (ONE HOUR BY JET TO THE NEAREST POINT ON THE CHINESE MAINLAND), CHINA POTENTIALLY COULD PROVIDE BADLY NEEDED SUPPORT FOR THE NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY, CHINA IS SUPPLYING OIL TO THE PHILIPPINES MORE INEXPENSIVELY THAN THE MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES, AND CHINA PROVIDES A POTENTIAL LARGE MARKET FOR PHILIPPINE PRODUCTS (SUGAR, COCONUT OIL AND COPPER WERE MENTIONED).

7. THE SPRATLYS, HOWEVER, HAVE EMERGED AS A MORE IMMEDIATE REASON FOR IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH THE PRC. THESE SOUTH CHINA SEA ISLANDS WITH THEIR POTENTIAL FOR OIL DEPOSITS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ARE A POSSIBLE SOURCE OF CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE PHILIPPINE MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE PRATLYS NUMBERS UP TO A BATTALION OF MARINES. IF THE VIETNAMESE WANTED TO PUSH THEM OUT, THEY WOULD PROBABLY HAVE LITTLE DIFFICULTY DOING SO. FOR THE MOMENT, THE PRC PROBABLY BELIEVES IT AND THE PHILIPPINES HAVE A COMMON INTEREST VIS-A-VIS THE VIETNAMESE. IN THE MEANTIME, THE PHILIPPINES CONTINUES TO STRENGTHEN PHYSICALLY ITS CLAIM. NEWSOM

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